

# Karma Yoga Negates the Doer

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**Mia:** Dear Sundari, it has been some time since Trout Lake, but you and James are never far from my mind as I continue along the Vedanta path. The photo was taken a few days ago at the Vedanta Temple in Santa Barbara, California, where I was visiting my children. I listened to an Irish(?) *swami* of the Ramakrishna Order give a talk... "Let the Dead Bury Their Dead"... and found it of course to be just what this *jiva* needed to hear.

I hope that you are well, and congratulations on becoming a grandmother. Every time I see a baby these days, I'm fascinated with watching that pure openness radiate from his/her eyes. I say "hi" to the self when our gazes meet. I do remember so clearly those few weeks after giving birth myself. The house felt like a sacred space bathed in bliss, and I was loathe to break the spell by leaving it. You could feel God's presence tangibly radiating in and around those little beings.

I continue with my Vedanta study and practice. I've been a seeker for most of my life, with all the twists and turns, ups and downs and spiritual cul de sacs for this one to explore. I've had some outstanding epiphanies that have served to inform and inspire. I've gotten the message and have indirect knowledge, but the lasting "knowing I am that" eludes Mia still.

The last two years have been especially challenging to this *jiva*, having moved from a relatively *sattvic* mind to one that is undeniably *rajasic* with *tamasic* undertones! Oh, where oh, where did my peaceful mind go, oh where, oh where can it be?... as my mind hums the old nursery rhyme. I do know that in reality I am always that which I seek, and I remind myself of that fact continually. I have no doubt about this, and as far as I'm concerned, the buck stops here with Vedanta. No more searching for me. Nevertheless, it feels like Mia is being tested big-time.

I found a book recently or rather it found me, called *A Guide to Spiritual Life: Spiritual Teachings of Swami Brahmananda* (it was a bookmark I found inside that led me to the temple in Santa Barbara!). He talks a lot about discipline and the need to keep up one's *sadhana* no matter what the *jiva* is thinking, feeling or questioning. And so I do to the best of my ability. Do you remember that show on TV called *Jeopardy*? I am constantly asking, "What is it in this moment that is constant and never moves or changes?" The answer... "What is the self?"! And then I recall the experiences/epiphanies that verify that truth, that is, where the vantage point was from the self.

Anyway, all this is to really get to a question I have for you. I am by appearances very much a householder, but I am equally drawn to a quiet and more contemplative life, having spent weeks in silence and meditation on and off over the years. I do believe that one doesn't need to have a *guru*, perhaps in the traditional way that James had, in order to actualize the self, that is, living in an *ashram* or community for an extended period of time. I understand that *karma yoga* is the way of the householder. But what if one is drawn to that *sannyasi* sort of experience? Whenever I am in the Presence of place that allows for deeper contemplation or while I am listening to *satsang*, as I experienced at the temple a few days ago, the body-mind thrills to the experience of it. Physically, the energy is a growing excitement in my body. Perhaps it's *kundalini*? If I wasn't so disinterested in sex, I would think it was those yearnings for sexual pleasure I was feeling. But it's decidedly not! I know all these experiences are just so much a coming and going. Yet I would

love to hear what you might say about any of this. The doer is still alive and kicking here while being continuously reminded that in truth there is nothing Mia needs to have, do or be in order to know the truth, the absence of ignorance... perfect and lasting certainty.

I am so glad you and James are coming to Santa Fe in June. If there is anything I can do to pave the way for your trip and experience here, please let me know. I did contact Spencer and Paddy about lending a hand. I would love to have you both for dinner one night, if you like. Or plan a trip to Ojo Caliente Hot Springs, if you have the time? No pressure!

Thanks for listening, Sundari. Please respond or not!, at your leisure.

~ Much love to you and James, Mia

**Sundari:** Hello, Mia. Lovely to hear from you and thanks for your kind offer of help, as well as dinner in Santa Fe. Certainly we can talk about it when we see you there. If you want to help with organising, contact the organisers and see if they need any help.

As to your question with regards to being drawn to live in a contemplative community, there is nothing inherently right or wrong about it. As with everything, it depends on your values and motivations for doing so. If you are running away from the world and hoping that a community experience is going to solve your problems because you have unresolved *jiva* issues, it will most likely not work. If you genuinely need to keep the company of like-minded people in order to assist in your *sadhana*, that is a different matter. Lifestyle issues are definitely important and must be addressed if self-inquiry is going to work. Whatever route you decide to follow, take action with the *karma yoga* spirit: knowing that the results are not up to you, surrender every thought word and deed to *Isvara* and take whatever results that do come as *prasad*.

As for needing a teacher or not, that depends too. The aim of Vedanta is to set you free of the need for a teacher as soon as possible, through the understanding that the self is the only *guru*. However, the meaning of the word "*guru*" is "he who dispels the darkness" – i.e. the one who removes ignorance. If the mind is qualified and the student ready to assimilate Vedanta, it is essential that it is properly taught by a qualified teacher, the reason being that ignorance is hardwired, Vedanta is counterintuitive, and if it is not properly unfolded the mind will interpret it according to its own conditioning.

You are right that there is nothing you need to do or experience, because no experience or action taken by a limited entity is going to produce a limitless result. Only self-inquiry, although an action, is capable of producing a limitless result because it leads to self-knowledge, which is limitless. All experiences, however exalted, occur in time and end in time. If the knowledge they are meant to impart is not assimilated, they are either useless or they create a *vasana* for another experience.

As you say, the doer appears to be alive and kicking, so my suggestion is that you continue self-inquiry into the true nature of the mind by subjecting it continuously to the scripture, with the *karma yoga* attitude. You are incorrect that *karma yoga* is exclusively the way of the householder. James and I are householders, and as we know we are not the doer, there is no need to practice *karma yoga*; we automatically do everything with the *karma yoga* spirit. It is just knowledge. Practicing *karma yoga* is for people who are still identified with being a doer. It is the only way to negate the doer and render the binding *vasanas* non-binding.

You seem to have established for yourself that there is nothing “out there” to gain in the world and that Vedanta is the only means of knowledge capable of removing ignorance. That is a great thing in your favour. It is also pretty normal that, when one embarks on the path to self-knowledge, all the unconscious stuff needs to become conscious. It can be a rough ride for the *jiva* at times. But the only way to be free of the *jiva* is to persevere with self-inquiry, looking at the conditioning in the light of self-knowledge. If one is dedicated to self-inquiry, the conditioning dissolves because once it is understood that the conditioning does not belong to the *jiva* but to *Isvara*, it is no longer binding. However, there is no shortcut to this. One has to first identify the conditioning (*vasanas* and the *gunas* that govern them) in order to dis-identify with it AS awareness. Many genuine inquirers do not understand this and they get stuck.

My advice to you would be to read *How to Attain Enlightenment* slowly and carefully, signing on to the logic every step of the way. Use the website to corroborate or to unravel doubts as it is a huge resource of high-level Vedanta. There is a new search function available now where you can search topics by word, teaching or teacher. Watch as many videos of James teaching as possible. Do whatever it takes. What price freedom?

Thanks for your good wishes re being a grandmother; it is indeed a beautiful experience to witness the purity of the self in such a tiny little soul.

~ Much love to you, Sundari